

HB 5192 Support

Chairman Caspersen and Committee Members, thank you for your time today.

My name is Pam Benzing. I come before you today as a resident of Hillsdale County; a Michigan Certified Hunter Safety Instructor; a member of the Michigan Outdoor Writers Association, the Outdoor Writers Association of America, Shooters Alliance for Firearms Rights (SAFR), the National Rifle Association, and lots of hunting organizations. Most importantly I come before you as a **parent** to speak in support of HB 5192 which will lower the minimum age for hunting large game.

I'm glad to see legislation lowering the minimum hunting age for large game. It would be even better to remove the minimum hunting age requirement altogether so that we can compete with the many other states that don't have such a requirement. But, for the time being I'll have to be satisfied with what is being offered. As a Hunter Safety Instructor I have seen many eleven and twelve year olds successfully complete Hunter Safety Education. A large number of these children already know how to safely hunt as they have spent time in the field with adult family members. They are eager to have their turn at taking a deer, or other game. As they go through the course, these young people show that they take hunter safety very seriously. They know that if they do not show themselves to be safe and responsible when hunting they will not pass and qualify for that coveted orange card.

In our Hunter Education Classes we are seeing more and more young children going through the classes because their parents are planning to take them somewhere outside of Michigan to hunt. Previously the DNR has objected to lowering the age when a child can begin to hunt because they have concerns about the ability of young children to successfully complete the Hunter Safety Education class. This issue is addressed in the Michigan Hunter Education Program Policies and Procedure Manual which states, "Instructors should not establish an age for enrollment in their classes. Those students who are at least 12 years of age or who will be 12 or older, during the upcoming hunting season should receive priority. Younger students may be accommodated as class size allows. Students under 11 years of age shall be accompanied by a parent or guardian or other adult...during the course." Involved parents know when their child is mature enough to sit through the classes as well as when they are ready to hunt safely and responsibly, whether that child is 8, like the young lady in Maryland who recently shot her first bear, or eighteen. My own son earned his orange card when he was nine so that he could run his own trap line.

Younger children who long to hunt usually belong to families that have the tradition of hunting together. And these families are going elsewhere to hunt with their young children. They are spending money in Ohio, Indiana, and out west that we could be keeping right here in our State. These hunting families rent motel rooms or campsites; they buy meals and snacks; they buy gas and ammunition - all in other states. This is revenue we could be capturing at home, if we had a lower minimum hunting age.

As a parent I support this bill as opening a way to pass down our hunting heritage to our children at an age when they are most interested in doing something that they see people whom they look up to, enjoying. In this time when those who do not understand what it means to harvest your own food are promoting their anti-hunting agenda, it is very important that we teach our children where our food comes from. It is important that we teach our children about the circle of life and the balance of nature. It is important that we teach our children how to be good conservationists by taking them out into the woods and fields and showing them how to take their part in maintaining that balance. It is important that we teach our children how to take responsibility for providing food for the family from our own back yard. And it is extremely important that we teach our children these things at an early age, before teenage pursuits pull them away. HB 5192 is a step in that direction.

I hope you will vote in support of keeping hunting families spending their money to hunt in Michigan, and bringing young people into our rich hunting heritage at an earlier age.

Thank you

(Pam Benzing, 9425 Steamburg Rd., Hillsdale, MI 49242, 517-254-4311)